

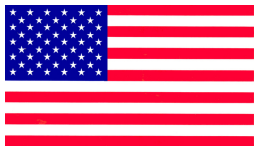
# GovConcepts

GACO APEX ACCELERATOR QUARTERLY INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

## ***36th GACO PROCUREMENT OPPORTUNITIES FAIR***

The 36th GACO Procurement Opportunities Fair is right around the corner! Join us at the Monroeville Convention Center on November 13th to capitalize on a day filled with networking, speakers and training opportunities. Visit the event page for more information or to register. We hope to see you there!

### **PROCUREMENT FAIR REGISTRATION AND INFORMATION**



**CELEBRATE NATIONAL  
VETERANS SMALL  
BUSINESS WEEK  
NOV. 3 - 7, 2025**

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## ***CMMC Becomes Law***

### **What's the Need to Know on DoD's Final Rule: Cybersecurity and CMMC Implementation**

CMMC cybersecurity regulations exist for the purpose of safeguarding federal government contracting information that flows through or resides on your company's information systems or devices. Beginning November 10, 2025 CMMC clauses will be in DoD contracts (with the exception of COTS purchases).

So, what's "federal contract information?" To put it simply, it is information not expressly open to the public, meant only for the government, its entities and contractors. The Basic Safeguarding of Covered Contractor Information Systems clause (FAR 52.204-21) details the cybersecurity standards for contractor systems.

What are your obligations? As a contractor or subcontractor, you are required to implement fifteen basic cybersecurity hygiene tasks. Doing so ensures that you are allowing only authenticated authorized users to access systems, processes, and devices where you store and transmit federal contract information.

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It works like this: when a contract necessitates a certain level of cybersecurity measures, a contractor or subcontractor's information systems must comply with one or more of the three CMMC assessment levels:

- CMMC Level 1 (15 controls) is the annual self-assessment based on FAR 52.204.21 (Basic Safeguarding of Covered Contractor Information Systems).

NIST SP 800-171 is foundational to complying with CMMC Level 2 and Level 3:

- CMMC Level 2 (110 controls) and NIST SP 800-171 requirements are applicable under DFARS 252.204-7020. To receive CMMC Level 2 certification a third-party CMMC Assessor Organization (C3APO) evaluates the company's implementation of the 110 controls, your System Security Plan (SSP) and your Plan of Action and Milestones (POA&M). This full system assessment occurs every three years. Additionally, as part of the compliance process, a senior company executive must perform an annual affirmation.
- CMMC's Level 3 is met by achieving level 2 certification status and also having an every three year government led assessment of the additional 24 requirements from NIST SP 800-172, for a total of 134 controls.

What happens if a business isn't fully compliant? Noncompliance with the law is not an option. In addition to losing government contracts, fines or legal fees, your company is vulnerable to cyber threats and costly operational disruptions.

## ***All in on AI?***

With the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into business practices, it is natural for businesses to wonder how to use it effectively to make themselves better. APEX Accelerators are sometimes asked how a business can use AI to make the RFP/RFQ bidding process easier and less time consuming and what platforms companies should use. While we don't advocate taking humans out of the equation, there is a strategy to consider.

### **Streamline Daily Operations**

Use AI to develop and streamline your business before you think about using it to write a proposal or agreement you could be legally bound to if awarded. Using AI tools to develop your company's internal processes first is a good, low-stakes way to gain experience in the effective use of AI as well as discover how best to incorporate it into your company's specific framework. The process of developing those skills and finding the best place to implement the technology will take time and effort, but it can pay off in the end.

**(AI continued from page 2)**

Start with day-to-day operations. AI assistants, notetakers, and tools can record and summarize meetings and extract action items to address as well as develop a timeline to accomplish them. Using AI powered email and document management tools can filter out junk emails and prioritize certain contacts. It can also help to efficiently retrieve or summarize emails and documents. It can even help develop responses and next steps. AI is also good at identifying patterns and performing repetitive tasks. Furthermore, manufacturers can use predictive analytics to identify bottlenecks or quality issues, while service-based companies can use it to better manage their time and effort.

**Enhance Customer Engagement**

Using chatbots on your company's website can help maintain 24/7 online customer service and can help customers easily find the information they need (or get in touch with a real person if necessary). A chatbot is only as good as the information it is trained with, so continuously updating the questions and answers it has access to will make the bot run more smoothly over time. Like a new employee, it takes them time to learn and understand the company's processes and become more fluid in their conversations with customers.

**Simplify Compliance and Research**

AI can summarize or explain things like FAR clauses or solicitations. While APEX Accelerators can sit down with you to review solicitations to help you come to the go—no go decision, AI can give you insights as well. Many GACO clients already use the Bid Match tool to simplify the process of finding opportunities. You can also pre-screen solicitations of interest by uploading the document to an AI platform and prompting it to give you key information like NAICS codes, scope of work, compliance requirements, etc. This allows you to further screen the solicitations you receive to ensure you only see the solicitations you are a great fit for. It is important, though, to take care not to upload documents that may contain Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI) or more sensitive documents. You can do the same with FAR Clauses. Just copy, paste, and ask for a simple and easily understood overview of the requirement. But remember, you can always ask your GACO counselor for insight or clarification.

The answer to using AI in government contracting isn't to replace human effort, but to augment it. Use this tool to improve your business' internal processes first. Then — and only then — might AI-driven proposal writing make sense. It's tempting to try automating one of the most time intensive aspects of the government contracting process, but it shouldn't be your first step. Start small. Choose one process to automate or streamline and go from there. While there is a learning curve to this new technology, it should not be difficult for small businesses to integrate it into their processes, making them more competitive in every market they participate in, not just government procurement.

## ***Veteran Business Outreach Center (VBOC)***

### ***Grand Opening***

There is now an additional resource available to help develop veteran and service-disabled veteran businesses. The newly opened Veteran Business Outreach Center in New Kensington, PA is based out of the existing Penn State LaunchBox and overseen by Joanna Sutton. The LaunchBox is a resource available to all small businesses in the first few years of their life cycle, offering hands-on assistance and strategies to help their growth. The addition of the VBOC to that platform means additional training and resources specifically available to veteran-owned businesses. Eligible businesses can participate in the SBA's Boots to Business trainings as well as other entrepreneurship training programs. The creation of this office is part of Penn State's larger effort to support veteran business owners across Pennsylvania, and the GACO is happy to be partnering with them going forward.

## ***Guidelines for Effective Networking***

### **BE PREPARED FOR THE PROCUREMENT OPPORTUNITIES FAIR ON NOVEMBER 13!**

- Prepare in advance. Have a list of questions you want to ask and specific agencies/booths you want to visit. Prepare some key points about your company for when it's your turn to talk.
- Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions like "How can I help your organization?" in order to understand the agency or prime's needs. Practice active listening, then explain how your company can help and provide value.
- Don't dominate the conversation or be overly aggressive. Networking is about building rapport, not about being center stage.
- Focus on making meaningful connections rather than collecting business cards. Concentrate on speaking with agencies and companies who have a specific interest in what you sell. Doing market research ahead of time can aid with this.
- Help others in your network. You might meet someone who doesn't buy your product or service but would be a great connection for another company you know. Sharing information can strengthen relationships, and your willingness to help others will be remembered and reciprocated.
- Follow up!!! One brief meeting at a networking event isn't enough to make a lasting impression. Be sure to follow up in a timely manner while both parties still have the conversation fresh in their mind.
- **And above all, be positive and have fun!**

## *Upcoming Events*

### **NOVEMBER**

#### **BOOTS TO BUSINESS**

U.S. Army Carlisle Barracks  
NOV. 12, 2025

[REGISTER](#)

#### **36th GACO PROCUREMENT OPPORTUNITIES FAIR**

Monroeville Convention Center, Monroeville, PA  
NOV. 13, 2025

[REGISTER](#)

#### **SAME 2025 FEDERAL SMALL BUSINESS CONFERENCE**

NOV. 19 - 21, 2025

[REGISTER](#)

#### **SBIR/STTR INNOVATION CONFERENCE**

NOV. 19 - NOV. 21, 2025

[REGISTER](#)

#### **CYBERSECURITY FOR MANUFACTURERS: PROTECTING THE SUPPLY CHAIN WEBINAR**

NOV. 20, 2025

[MORE INFO](#)

### **DECEMBER**

#### **TRI-STATE APEX ACCELERATOR**

#### **MEGA MATCHMAKER**

DEC. 2 AND 3, 2025

[REGISTER](#)

## *Further Reading*

[CMMC IS HERE - NOW WHAT?](#)

[FINALIZED INCREASES TO MICRO-PURCHASE, SAT AND OTHER THRESHOLDS](#)

[FEDERAL CIO FULLY COMMITTED TO GSA 20X AS IT MOVES INTO PHASE TWO](#)

[THE ARMY WANTS AI TO HELP MAN ARTILLERY AND AIR DEFENSE UNITS](#)

## ***What You Missed - Recent GACO Training Events Recap***

### **Casting, Forging and Machining: Insights from DoD Industry Experts Webinar**

Industry professionals from the Department of Defense Casting, Forging and Machining programs offered a unique opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of these critical areas of defense manufacturing.

### **Doing Business with the Commonwealth Webinar**

Representatives from the PA Department of General Services and COSTARS program offered insights on doing business with the Commonwealth, including applying for a COSTARS contract and finding opportunities on the PA eMarketplace.

### **Becoming a Successful Construction Subcontractor Webinar**

Representatives from PJ Dick's Outreach and Estimating departments shared best practices on how to prepare and succeed as a subcontractor in the construction industry.

### **SBA Mentor Protege Program (MPP) Webinar**

Dave Pinkosky, SBA Business Opportunities Specialist, gave an informative presentation on what the Mentor Protege Program is and how both large and small businesses can benefit from it.

## ***TRIVIA!!***

**Q:** When was Veterans Day originally established, and what was its original name?

**A:** Veterans Day was originally established on November 11, 1919, as Armistice Day. It commemorated the armistice signed between the Allies of World War I and Germany, marking the end of World War I.



**THIS APEX ACCELERATOR IS FUNDED IN PART THROUGH A COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE.**